



Expanding Ethical Work Environments: Impact on Nurse Satisfaction

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INTRODUCTION

Historically, the nursing workforce has managed high turnover rates and evolving patient and staffing patterns reflective of managed care initiatives. The current global nursing shortage, while not widespread in every geographical location, is still a concern among many administrators. Recruiting, and more importantly retaining, a competent, loyal and committed workforce is a goal of any health care organization. Federal and watchdog groups are calling for improved work environments, thus the impetus for this study.

PURPOSE

Study Purposes:

1. Identify if there is a relationship between moral distress, ethical environment and job satisfaction.
2. Identify if there is a relationship between moral distress intensity, moral distress frequency and an ethical work environment.



RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Empirical research on the relationship between ethical work environment and nurse satisfaction and moral distress has been consistently reported in the literature. Silen, et. al (2011) reported situations that solicited high levels of moral distress such as lack of resources, working with people of low competency and implementing unnecessary treatments.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Is there a relationship between moral distress, ethical environment and job satisfaction?
2. What is the relationship between moral distress intensity, moral distress frequency and an ethical work environment?

EXAMPLE SURVEY QUESTIONS

Moral Distress Scale

{1} Provide less than optimal care due to pressures to reduce cost.
{9} Assist a physician who in my opinion is providing incompetent care.
{12}. Provide care that does not relieve the patient's suffering because I fear that increasing the dose of pain medication will cause death.

Hospital Ethical Climate Survey

{6} Nurses have access to the information necessary to solve a patient care issue/problem ...
{14} I participate in treatment decisions for my patients
{18} I work with competent colleagues ...

METHODOLOGY

An informational and instructional letter inviting nurses to participate was sent to all registered nurses employed full time in 2 hospitals. Nurses voluntarily accessed 2 surveys via Survey Monkey which indicated their consent to participate in the study. Surveys:

Moral Distress Scale (MDS)

Measured 2 aspects of moral distress: frequency and intensity (level of disturbance).

Hospital Ethical Climate Survey

Measures workplace influences on the nurses' ability to practice and make decisions from an ethical perspective. The nurses' relationships with key players are captured in this instrument.

In addition, general background and demographic data were collected.



RESULTS

Research Question #1:

Pearson Product Correlation
•weak to moderate, negative relationship between ethical environment and frequency of moral distress
•as ethical climate increased, frequency of moral decreased

Research Question #2:

Pearson Product Correlation
•weak negative relationship between ethical environment and intensity
•as ethical climate decreased the intensity increased

DISCUSSION

•This study demonstrates that a relationship does exist between practicing in an ethical environment and the nurses' level of moral distress.

•An initiative such as AACN's *Rise Above Moral Distress Toolkit* (2006) is one example of how nurse leaders can address this complex issue.

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